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Letter dated 5 June 2013 from the Permanent Representative of Uzbekistan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to inform you that in 2013 the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea celebrates its twentieth anniversary (see annex).

Uzbekistan first came up with the initiative to unite the efforts of the region and the international community to overcome the consequences of the Aral Sea crisis, maintain the ecological balance of the area and create a clean environment for the population. During the summit held in Tashkent in January 1993, the Heads of State of Central Asia decided to establish the regional organization for saving the Aral Sea.

The General Assembly of the United Nations, by its resolution 63/133 of 11 December 2008, invited the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea to participate as an observer in its sessions and in its work. The United Nations thereby recognizes the Fund as a cooperative partner that shares its goals and aspirations. Adoption of the resolution also provides the Fund with an opportunity to strengthen its relations with the United Nations system.

In 2013, the location of the Executive Committee of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea will move to Tashkent for three years. During this period, Uzbekistan, as the chair of the Fund, is committed to coordinating cooperation at the national and international levels in order to use existing water resources more effectively and to improve the environmental and socioeconomic situation in the Aral Sea basin.

In this regard, it is important to note that the Government of Uzbekistan has recently adopted a programme of actions towards environmental protection for the period of 2013-2017. About $2 billion will be allocated for the implementation of the programme, including comprehensive monitoring of the environmental situation in the northern areas of the Surkhondaryo region.

It would be appreciated if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the sixty-seventh session of the General Assembly, under agenda item 20.

(*Signed*) Dilyor **Khakimov**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the letter dated 5 June 2013 from the Permanent Representative of Uzbekistan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

[Original: Russian]

Twentieth anniversary of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea

The year 2013 marks the twentieth anniversary of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea.

In 1992 Uzbekistan first launched the initiative to unite the efforts of States in the region and the international community to address the impacts of the Aral Sea crisis, maintain the ecological balance and establish a clean living environment for the population.

At the summit held in Tashkent in January 1993, the Heads of State of Central Asia and Kazakhstan supported Uzbekistan's initiative to establish a regional organization for saving the Aral Sea.

The problems of the Aral Sea date from long ago, but in the 1960s they acquired threatening proportions. Population growth and rising water needs, large-scale land reclamation, the continuing development of agriculture and the frequent occurrence of consecutive low-water years have created the conditions for one of the biggest global environmental disasters in recent history — the drying up of what used to be one of the most beautiful bodies of water on the planet.

Not only the population living directly in the disaster zone, but the population of the entire region of Central Asia and Kazakhstan lives in an area that is under constant environmental threat and subject to factors that negatively affect their quality of life, their health and the gene pool.

The Fund and its organizations have been in existence for 20 years and in this short time they have become an effective platform to support the negotiation process and take consolidated action on issues of regional water use. Countries of the Central Asian region and Kazakhstan can use this cooperation mechanism to address key issues in improvement of the environmental situation in the Aral Sea region, as well as the management and distribution of transboundary water resources.

The granting to the Fund in 2008 of observer status in the General Assembly has opened new perspectives for its activities at the global level.

There is no doubt that the Fund has been successful in drawing the attention of the international community, many national Governments and a wide range of international institutions to the problem of the Aral Sea.

The World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, a number of international organizations and various States are currently participating in and providing support for a variety of projects designed to improve this unfortunate regional situation that threatens the gene pool of the population.

Water is of crucial importance to the future development of Uzbekistan. Having recognized the social significance of irrigation and developed a sound national water sector policy, Uzbekistan has not only maintained its irrigation

capacity since gaining independence, but also successfully modernized and improved its irrigation systems. Uzbekistan has made radical changes to the way it manages its water. Integrated water resources management principles, modern water-saving technologies, and automated control and management systems for water distribution have been implemented widely. Measures have also been taken, inter alia, to improve the technical condition of water facilities and the reclamation of land and to diversify agricultural production. These measures include the following:

- In 1993 strict limits were placed on water use, while in 2003 there was a transition to a watershed management approach for water resources, with constant improvement of legislation on water use.
- Efforts have been made to diversify agricultural production. Water-intensive crops such as rice and cotton have been replaced as the Government has encouraged less water-intensive agriculture, with crops such as grains and melons, and the cultivation of orchards and vineyards. Compared to the 1980s, the area under cotton has dropped from 2 million to 1.2 million ha and the area under rice has shrunk from 180,000 to 40,000 ha.
- The Government has earmarked substantial funding from its budget for the improvement of water management infrastructure. The World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the Islamic Development Bank and other international financial institutions have provided over $1.2 billion of investment funds over the past 10 years for the repair and modernization of irrigation and drainage facilities.
- There has been wide implementation of water-saving irrigation technologies, including drip irrigation and irrigation through flexible tubing or tape. Over the past three years, drip irrigation systems have been introduced over an area of 5,500 ha, and this area will expand by an additional 5,000 ha each year. As a result, the coefficient of irrigation system efficiency is improving and water losses are being reduced.
- In accordance with the State Programme for 2008-2012, the Government earmarked $500 million from its budget on measures for reclamation of irrigated land. The work already carried out has reclaimed 1.2 million ha of land.
- The Land Reclamation Fund of the Ministry of Finance was established in 2007 to improve the condition of reclaimed land in the Republic.

As a result of the measures taken, Uzbekistan is the only country in the region to have reduced its water intake compared to the 1980s, with a 21 per cent reduction from 64 billion to 51 billion m^3.

Over the past 15 years, water has been brought to 380,000 ha of the Amudaria river delta and local reservoirs have been built to encourage the recovery of flora and fauna. In order to prevent further movement of salt and dust in the zone affected by the Aral crisis, trees have been planted over an area of 740,000 ha, including an area of 310,000 ha of dry seabed.

These figures are a clear indication that Uzbekistan is taking an active role in the practical resolution of the issues of the Aral Sea basin.

By the same token, the following measures, to be implemented at the regional level, are the key priorities for efforts to address the impact of the drying up of the Aral Sea and in environmental rehabilitation of the Aral Sea basin:

- The creation of local reservoirs on the dry bed of the Aral Sea and bringing water to the delta reservoirs to prevent sand and salt storms and restore biodiversity and the delta's ecosystem.
- Planting trees on the dry bed of the Aral Sea, sand-dune stabilization and reduction of the leaching of toxic aerosols from the dry seabed.
- Provision of drinking water and outfitting of community and treatment facilities with water sterilization devices, refurbishment of water intake facilities with chlorination systems and other measure to improve the living conditions and health of the population of the Aral Sea region.
- A comprehensive study of the impact of the growing environmental crisis in the Aral Sea region on the state of health and the gene pool of the population, early warning and prevention concerning the widespread human diseases that are specific to the region, the deployment of a specialized network of preventive and treatment facilities for the population living in the area, and the implementation of a comprehensive programme of measures to ensure rapid growth in social infrastructure.

In connection with the Aral Sea tragedy and the recovery measures, the solution to this problem is directly linked to the rational use of the water resources of the region's transboundary rivers, which have always met the vital needs of the States located in their basins.

In this connection, there is increasing concern at the growing aspirations of the upstream States to implement a hydroelectric policy that imposes their hydraulic regime on the rivers, together with their plans to implement extremely contradictory projects for the construction of major hydraulic facilities at the sources of the largest transboundary rivers.

In addressing the issues that arise in connection with the management of transboundary water resources, Uzbekistan believes that any activities making use of those resources should take into account the interests of all States located in the basin and should be implemented according to the generally accepted norms of international law.

Uzbekistan is the only State in Central Asia to have signed both the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes of 17 March 1992 and the Convention on the Law of the Non-navigational Uses of International Watercourses of 21 May 1997.

The increasing application of international law and better use of the Fund's capacity offer reference points for future joint action on all complex problems, taking account of the interests of all countries in the region.

In Uzbekistan, the Fund is considered an important platform for cooperation among States of the region in addressing water resource management and environmental protection.

Uzbekistan, as one of the Fund's founding States, attaches great significance to the comprehensive strengthening of the Fund's activities.

In 2013, the presidency of the Fund will be transferred from Kazakhstan to Uzbekistan for the next three-year period. During its presidency, Uzbekistan intends to give priority to strengthening regional dialogue in accordance with the norms of international law, making better use of the Fund's capacity, improving the socioeconomic and water-environmental situation in the Aral Sea region and expanding the Fund's international contacts.

The countries of the region should make joint efforts to enhance the international standing and role of the Fund and the effective implementation of the Third Aral Sea Basin Programme. The Programme includes 68 projects for implementation in Uzbekistan alone, for a total cost of $2,715,400,000.

During its presidency of the Fund, Uzbekistan intends to increase cooperation in the context of the Fund and to support effective action by the Executive Committee in Tashkent.